

critical digest

Vol. II No. 23

March 27, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Helen Hayes stars in Joshua Logan's play based on Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard". Kent Smith, Walter Abel and Peggy Conklin are featured in play presented by Logan and Leland Hayward.

Shows That Closed

All You Need Is One Good Break-Mansfield, 2/9/50-3/11/50. Arnold Manoff's play with two lives closed for second and final time. Lee Grant, John Berry and J. Edward Bromberg were praised for their histrionic talents, but Manoff was accused of putting his play together with a paste pot. Bolton, Morning Telegraph, was the only critic who enjoyed the play. Pollock, Compass, wrote a follow-up story suggesting the critics might have been a bit too harsh on the playwright.

Daily Reviewers Look At the New Show

Great To Be Alive-Winter Garden, 3/23/50. Split decision on Vinton Freedley's presentation of Bullock-Regan musical comedy. Five "pros", five "cons". News, Herald Tribune, World Telegram and Sun, Women's Wear Daily critics enjoyed the mixing of music, comedy, fantasy and ghosts. Watts, Post, considered it a ramshackle but strangely pleasant affair. The others thought the authors' original idea was more attractive than the product. Valerie Bettis' dancing drew raves; material for Stuart Erwin and Vivienne Siegel was termed weak. Everyone worked hard, they concluded, but nothing came of it.

The Magazine Critics View the Plays

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Four music critics and five drama critics join the "bravos" shouted for the new work of triple-threat Gian-Carlo Menotti, who at 38 has been nicknamed "boy wonder" by the caption writers. All praised his skill in staging the melodramatic book, and his splendid selection of the cast. Patricia Neway was welcomed as the town's newest star; Marie Powers won another set of beautiful notices. But the music critics were not wholly enthusiastic about the score. Watt, New Yorker, and the music critic of Time didn't find much musical originality in it. While Kolodin, SRL, and the music critic of Newsweek both thought the score was equal in power and interest to the script. Gabriel, Cue, yelled "Sermon on the Podium". Daily Worker critic liked Regina better, but thought this was a fine example of "good commercial theatre". Trade critics liked it, but Variety critic wondered if it would be popular.

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep-Broadhurst, 3/2/50. Clurman, New Republic and Phelan Commonweal, enjoyed the Elaine Ryan dramatization of the Bemelmans novel starring the Marches, but they couldn't be specific as to their reasons. Clurman condemned the cartoon-like sets, the heterogeneous acting and the bad case of under-direction; but he still found a certain pleasing quality in the "rare, if somewhat pleasing dish." Phelan echoed his comments, but she thought Croyn's direction was more than adequate.

News & Notes

Critics Circle meets April 4th to vote for best play, best musical and best foreign play...Antoinette Perry Awards will be made April 9th...Lee Tracy will launch a 15 minute weekly theatrical gossip program April 5th over WOR (N.Y.) at 9:15 P.M. sponsored by Baker Brushes...Robert Sylvester, drama editor of News, is having second picture made from his novel "Rough Sketch"...Ward Morehouse, WT&S, has signed with Whittlesey for a book of personal recollections and reminiscences.

' The Green Room Department '

DEFENDS SHUBERTS...George Jean Nathan has joined the Shuberts against the Justice Department. He doesn't think the government has shown much intelligence in forcing their monopoly suit. A mere look at the dearth of available plays proves that the charges are false.

ON MINORITY OPINIONS...Supporting his "con" reviews of three established hits, Watts, Post, is glad to see that the paying customers are not cowed by the critics in choosing their theatre fare. Likewise, he notes, "The Cocktail Party has become a hit without the backing of the 'intellectual critics'."

IDEA OF THE WEEK...Come the award season Bennett Cerf, SRL, promotes his "Hatchet Squad" plan to limit plays, books and movies. His scheme would fine the producer of the play voted the "All Conquering Number One Stinker" by a board of judges. Three such annual awards, he hopes, would limit the amount of trash produced.

WHERE'S REGINA...Continuing his underground movement to get Regina back on Broadway, Pollock, Compass, looks at the success of The Consul as a step in the right direction. Blitzstein's aim of modern opera is a higher and more logical goal than Menotti's, in Pollock's opinion.

SECOND VISIT...Ray Bolger, star of Where's Charley, is the nearest thing in town to perpetual motion, Sheaffer, Eagle, raved after visiting the musical that has run more than 600 performances. The critic considers this Bolger vehicle ideally suited to Bolger's diverse talents.

FIRST PERSON SINGULR...Variety discovered in an unusual grammatical survey that the critics of eight N.Y. dailies used the word "I" 309 times in reviewing the shows of the past two months. Chapman, News, used it 98 times in covering the 16 shows, runner-ups were Garland, Journal-American, 78 and Watts, Post, 64. Pollock, Compass, didn't use it at all, while Atkinson, Times, and Barnes, Herald Tribune, each used an indirect first person reference once.

' Interview Round Up '

PATRICIA NEWAY...New-found star of The Consul has the interviewers beating a path to her cold water flat. She can't start to think of moving out of the apartment until her debts are paid, she told Torre, WT&S. "I am just trying to hold on to my head," she revealed to Fields, Mirror, when he asked if the raves were changing her. Fields is convinced she will remain as she is.

EILEEN PEEL...New Yorkers are a friendly people, the English actress in The Cocktail Party, confided to Morehouse, WT&S. But she doubts if they would be as nice to her if she had appeared in a flop.

LUDWIG BEMEIMANS...The author of Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep and his two dogs entertained Sylvester, News, at his apartment. Bemelmans expressed a hearty dislike for Philadelphia, a stop on the tryout route of the play. The drama editor, who had been expecting to sample Bemelmans' cooking, was surprised to find the dinner was from Casserole Kitchen.

PEARL BAILEY...Hawkins, WT&S, found that the "style" of the star of Arms and the Girl is simply a projection of her own personality. She normally talks in the slurring drawl that delights audiences, her hand waving comes from her father who is a Reverend of the Holy Rollers.

' Off Broadway '

HEARTBREAK HOUSE...Revival of the George Bernard Shaw's play by On-Stage didn't meet with the favor the group's past works have won. Shanley, Times, agreed with the other daily critics that the play was much too long, but he did think it remained an exciting, competent job. Phodna, Herald Tribune, also thought the production was acceptable, but could do with a little less shouting. Watts, Post, found the cast notably unimpressive.

GREAT BIG DOORSTEP...Three critics had a wonderful time at the Equity Community Theatre production at the DeWitt Clinton Community Center in the Bronx. Atkinson, Times, found that the comedy by Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett is better paced for peacetime viewing than it was in 1942. Hawkins, WT&S, suggested a slight tightening of the pace, but praised the revival. Rice, Post, is positive the show would settle down for a long Off-Broadway run. All praised the fine acting, top honors went to Clarice Blackburn, on leave from The Happy Time.

ONE MAN-SHOW...Eddie Cantor's "My Forty Years in Show Business" filled Carnegie Hall for three solid hours. Garland, Journal-American, rated it one of the best shows of the season. Fumke, Times, and Rice, Post, liked it, but Fumke wondered if the show appealed as much to the youngsters as to the oldsters.

' The Lighter Side '

TWO LINE REVIEWS..."I Remember Papa or/ Facts of life in Ottawa" is the poesy comment of Dickstein, Eagle on The Happy Time.

CRITICAL OSMOSIS...Farrell, WT&S, reports an overheard conversation between an unnamed critic and a showman at Freeman Chum's. Asking why the critic panned the play, even though he stayed till the end, he was told "I had to pan the play, Wolcott Gibbs (New Yorker) fell asleep on my shoulder."

TRUE CONFESSIONS...Gabriel, Cue, penned a note to Ashton Stevens, Chicago critic, whispers Winchell, Mirror. "You can either love the theatre or you can review it," he wrote. When he gave up daily criticism, Gabriel said "Now I can be hated for myself alone."

' Key To NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Show are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Photostats of reviews may be obtained at 25 cents each to subscribers, 50 cents each to others.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (Star, PM) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. New Republic |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

Arms and the Girl-46th Street Theatre, 2/2/50. Pro: 3-4-5-10-11-12-14-15-17-19-23-24-30. Con: 1-7-8-16-18-29. So-So: 2-6-9-26-27.

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. Pro: 3-4-6-7-9-10-11-12-16-17-18-19-22-26-29. Con: 1-2-23-24-25-27-30. So-So: 5-8-14-28.

Caesar and Cleopatra-National, 12/21/49. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 5-8-13. So-So: 9.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-12-15-17-19-20-21-23-27-30. Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-23-24-26-27-28. Con: 1-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 1-5-8-9-10-11-14-16-17-18-19-22-23-26-29. Con: 2-7-12-27. So-So: 3-6-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-26-27-30. So-So: 6.

Death of a Salesman-Mároscé, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-26-27-30.

The Devil's Disciple-Royale, 2/21/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-18-19-22-23-26-29. Con: 30. So-So: 16.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 20. Con: 6-21-28. So-So: 16-22-27.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 19. Con: 5-6-7-26-27-30. None: 13-20-21.

I Know My Love-Shabert, 11/1/49. Pro: 21. Con: 5-16-22-27-28-29. None: 13.

The Innocents-Playhouse-2/1/50. Pro: 23. Con: 2-4-28-29-30. None: 20-21.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28. Con: 29. None: 28.

Last In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

The Man-Fulton, 1/19/50. Pro: 2-4-8-10-11-12-14-15-23-26. Con: 1-3-5-6-9-12-13-16-19-22-27-30. So-So: 7-17-18.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. So-So: 2-27-30. None: 21.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-25-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17. None: 28.

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep-Broadhurst, 3/2/50. Pro: 2-10-12-15-19-22-29-30. Con: 1-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-14-16-17-18-23-27. So-So: 26.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-21-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-21-22-24. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27.

The Velvet Glove-Golden, 12/26/49. Pro: 15. Con: 2-5-16-18-22-23-27-30. So-So: 1-6-29. None: 25-28.

There's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

